Problem-Based Learning Methods for Training Staff for Tourism and Hospitality Clusters

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ABSTRACT

The paper argues the relevance of using the problem-based learning (PBL) method for training staff for tourism and hospitality clusters. The paper aims to summarize the results of the research undertaken at Kemerovo State University where the best practices of using PBL at Aalborg University (Denmark) and the University of Applied Sciences for Management & Communication (FHWien der WKW) (Austria) were applied in course of implementing the Tempus TOULL (tourism and Lifelong Learning Network) project. The research was based on the methods of expert assessment, pedagogical experiment, Problem-Based Learning (PBL), Life-Long Learning (LLL), CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) and others. The paper reflects the key challenges of developing and teaching Master's Degree programs in Tourism at Russian universities. The features of using the PBL method are grounded, and the prospects of establishing Regional Tourism Resource Centres for running professional development and retraining programs are described basing on the example of Kemerovo State University. The key competences of the students taking up professional development and retraining programs in tourism and

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hospitality are listed. The materials presented in this paper will be useful for both knowledge institutions training tourism and hospitality staff and tourism and hospitality enterprises.

Keywords: competence, skill, training staff, competence-based approach, problem-based learning, university, tourism, tourism and hospitality clusters.

INTRODUCTION

In the present-day world, professional training is undergoing substantial change, primarily in terms of the teaching methods. Problem-Based Learning (PBL), Life-Long Learning (LLL), and CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) are being used more and more often[1, 2, 3].

Barrows & Tamblyn (1980) define Problem-Based Learning as "a learning method based on the principle of using problems as a starting point for the acquisition and integration of new knowledge." [4]

According to A. Farhoomand (2003), the main idea of this method can be described in the following way: students are engaged in complex issues and encouraged to take the roles of problem-solvers. It allows learners to take part in real-life decision making process by first identifying the "major" question before formulating appropriate solutions [5].

M.V. Falaleeva and E.Yu. Kosheleva (2011) argue that when using PBL in teaching foreign languages, the teacher should observe the key prerequisites for applying this method. In the first place, the teacher should make sure that the learners realize the aims and the advantages of problem-based learning [6].

A. Rösner et al (2016) also highlight that the role of the teacher changes: teachers do not lecture or instruct students, but rather motivate them to learn and provide feedback in the learning process [7].

All this allows considering Problem-Based Learning, as well as Life-Long Learning, and Content and Language Integrated Learning as the most effective teaching methods for both Master's Degree programs in Tourism and Hospitality and professional development and retraining programs for the staff of tourism and hospitality clusters.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The authors used the following research methods: studying and summarizing the experience of training tourism industry staff and the pedagogical theory and practice of teaching foreign languages for special purposes, the expert assessment method, analyzing the results and activities of retraining programs' graduates, diagnostic methods, and pedagogical experiment method.

The suggested methods were validated while teaching Master's Degree programs and professional development and retraining programs for tourism and hospitality clusters staff at Kemerovo State University.

RESULTS

One of the outcomes of the Tempus project "Master's programs in Tourism for four Siberian universities" was the dissemination of the developed curriculum to Kemerovo State University (KemSU), where the Master's Degree Program in Tourism was launched at the Faculty of History and International Relations in 2012. For the faculty's administration and staff this has brought two major challenges:

a. teaching a program in an applied and practice-oriented major (Tourism) compared to more academic and theoretical majors that the faculty used to teach (History and International Relations);

b. teaching a new type of students (Master's Degree), who already had their first degree as well as working experience, and thus were more interested in learning practical skills rather than being lectured. (The transition of the Russian educational system from one-stage (Specialist's degree – 5 years of training) to the two-stage (Bachelor's Degree + Master's Degree) in Russia was officially launched nationally in 2011, when Master's degree program started appearing in most Russian universities. Moreover, the new Federal National Educational Standard of Higher Professional Education introduced in 2011 (to regulate the transition to the Bologna system of two-stage higher education) decreed that education should be oriented at skills as the key outcome, and it is skills rather than knowledge that should be tested in final assessment).

Development and implementation of the problem-based learning method at universities

Training a new type of specialists in a new type of program required implementing a new type of methodology – problem-based learning and life-long learning methods. In 2013-2014 the teachers of Kemerovo State University studied the best practices of using PBL at Aalborg University (Denmark) and the University of Applied Sciences for Management & Communication (FHWien der WKW) (Austria) in course of implementing the Tempus TOULL (Tourism and Lifelong Learning Network) project. A series of methodological seminars for KemSU's as well as other universities' teachers allowed further dissemination of the experience of using those technologies in training and professional retraining of specialists.

The PBL method is skill-oriented, and its essence lies using the real "problem situation" cases encountered by specialists and companies within a particular industry as the "starting point" for learning new knowledge and testing the skills acquired within the learning process. The elements of PBL can be differently in teaching different courses: either as a logical basis of teaching a discipline/module as a whole, or as a tool for summarizing the knowledge acquired in each class – when at the end of the class 1-2 cases are solve, or as a form of final assessment. For example, at the beginning of studying a new educational module the teacher introduces their students to a real problem encountered by one of the tourist companies of the region – and throughout the semester, students gradually gain the knowledge needed to solve the problem situation, and in the final lesson they present their suggested solutions. Overall, this educational technology is quite popular in the Western methodology where it is known as the "case study" method. However, the characteristic

feature of the PBL method is that the cases offered to students are not simulated situations but real "problem situations" of modern business that need to be solved urgently. Thus, it is logical and most effective to involve representatives of the (tourism) industry into teaching, both for teaching entire courses and as 'guests': to present their problem in the first session, provide interim consultations and assess the final projects – proposed solutions to 'problems'. Thus, in the PBL concept it is industry representatives who are the authors of the tasks – 'cases' and sugges students to solve their real 'problem situations' – while the university teacher acts as a 'facilitator', helping students to learn to solve the urgent problems of modern industry with the example of the proposed situations [8].

Successful implementation of this technology requires a stable contact with the industry. Particularly, at KemSU successful implementation of this educational technology is due to the presence of strong ties with the professional community, since the Regional Tourism Resource Center at Kemerovo state University is the coordinating organization of the Tourism Cluster of Kuzbass. It also allows the faculty to fulfill the requirements of the Federal State Educational Standard of Higher Education (FSES HE 3+), according to which industry representatives (as future employers) should be involved in teaching at least 5 % of the total contact hours.

The use of new teaching methods, different from those that the students got used to used to while studying for their first/primary degree, promotes the interest and motivation for learning. After solving the first of the suggested 'problems', the students start realizing that all the knowledge they acquire within the course can actually be applied in real practice and work experience. Moreover, the use of active learning technologies promotes the development of students' general cultural competences such as teamwork skills, responsibility for the results/outcomes of their work, etc., since it implies a large amount of independent and group work on solving the 'problems'.

Thus, the graduates of the programs involving the PBL method are equipped with practical skills for solving the real 'problems' of tourism and hospitality companies, and thus can 'engage' into work immediately after being employed with minimal in-job pre-training – which makes a great difference from most Russian university graduates who have very profound theoretical knowledge but may have no experience of using it in practice. Realizing this, the representatives of the tourism and hospitality clusters willingly engage in the educational process – thus, preparing highly qualified staff for the industry.

Assessing the demand for professional development and retraining programs for the tourism and hospitality clusters staff

KemSU Tourism Resource Centre was established as a platform for the cooperation of the stakeholders in the "universities – business – government" network for promoting tourism development in Kuzbass. On the one hand, as it has already been mentioned, it gave KemSU the opportunity to attract industry representatives to teaching courses to Bachelor's and Master's Degree students. On the other hand, one of the fields of KemSU Tourism Resource Centre's activities is developing and running educational programs for the professional development and professional retraining of the staff of the tourism and hospitality cluster of the region. In 2013, the marketing research "Attitudes of employers,

tourism industry representatives, government and knowledge institutions to the system of additional professional education in the field of tourism" [9] was conducted, the results of which formed the basis of the curricula of the educational programs for the tourism industry staff.

The research results suggest that according to the opinions of the survey participants, tourism resource centers must focus on training the staff to develop all types of tourism, as indicated by 50% of the respondents. The rest of participants answered that the educational programs should focus on developing inbound tourism (30 %) and domestic tourism (20 %).

Moreover, within the research the demand for professional development and retraining programs for the tourism industry was studied, which showed that the greatest demand is for the programs on the tourism services sales technologies (Fig. 1.)
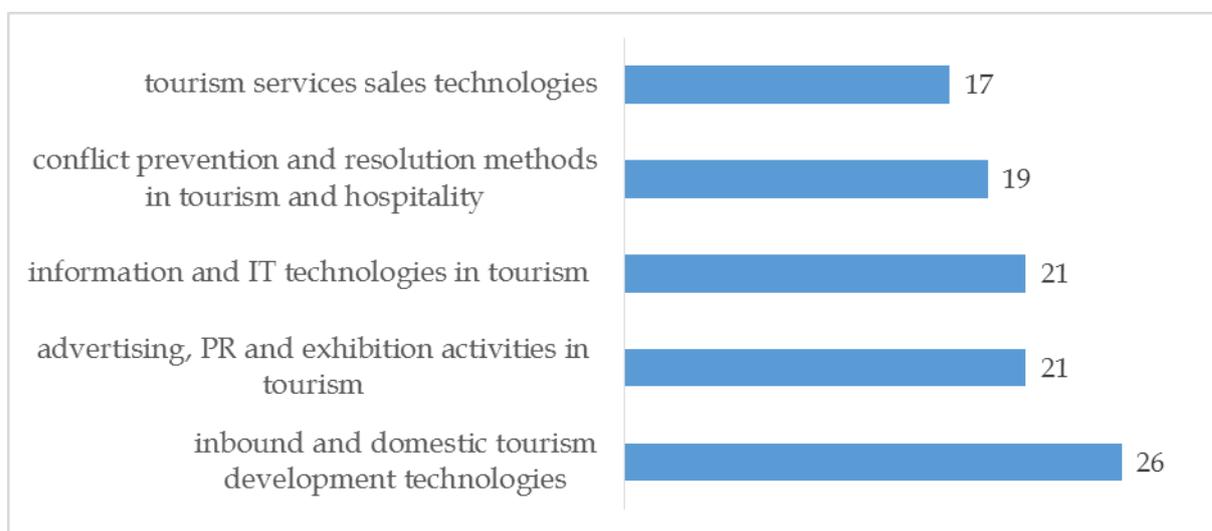

Figure 1. The tourism industry representatives' answers to the question:

«Which professional development programs are most required by the industry?»

As seen from **Figure 1**, the programs on advertising, PR and exhibition activities in tourism as well as information and IT technologies in tourism were also in high demand, each chosen by 21 % of the respondents.

In 2014-2015 four professional development programs and the professional retraining program "Social and cultural service in tourism" (with the awarded qualification of "Manager of socio-cultural service and tourism" were implemented at Kemerovo State University. Over 250 people (the staff of Kuzbass tourism and recreation enterprises) were trained in those programs. In 2015, two professional development programs were run at Kemerovo State University for the staff of the companies – members of the Tourism Cluster of Kuzbass. The curricula of the programs were developed taking into consideration the demands of the region's tourism enterprises; the programs underwent expert assessment procedures and were approved by the Council of the Cluster.

The experience of training the professional community was disseminated by KemSU at the meetings of the Educational and Methodical Association on Tourism, as well as in the framework of the program 'Development and implementation of the curricula for the Tourism, Service, Hospitality majors', where 132 participants from more than 10 Russian regions were trained. The experience of using PBL methods in teaching courses on tourism was reflected in the textbooks, written by the professors of Kemerovo State University with the participation of the leading practitioners; the textbooks were given positive assessment and received visas of the Educational and Methodical Association on Tourism [10, 11, 12, 13].

The PBL method was as well the basis for the curricula of the professional development programs for the tourism industry staff. The greatest value of this technology was to use the 'problems' of the local tourist industry (the tourist enterprises, where the trainees work) as a starting point for learning. Thus, all the classes and all the competences formed in the process of learning could be applied in the trainees' professional activities, which was highly praised both by the trainees and the tourism industry of Kuzbass as a whole.

Development and implementation of the retraining programs in foreign languages for the tourism industry staff with the use of the CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) method

One of the major challenges for the development of tourism in Kuzbass is the insufficient level of the language skills of the Kuzbass tourism industry staff. Their experience of learning foreign languages at school and at university is often associated with studying grammar, reading and translating texts and memorizing the topical vocabulary while communicative skills are often seen as secondary in this paradigm. Thus, one of the most popular professional development programs was "Foreign language for the sphere of tourism", whose curriculum was later modified taking into account the opinion of the Council of the Tourism Cluster of Kuzbass, and the new program was entitled "English for professional communication (tourism and tour guiding)". The program curriculum included 2 major modules: English for communication and Professional English. In the first module, students revised basic conversational formulas needed for everyday communication in English and for communicating with foreign tourists on everyday topics and studied the required vocabulary for guiding excursions. In the second module the trainees studied and updated the vocabulary and grammar structures needed to communicate on the topics "Service" (hotel and restaurant service; Russian (Siberian) traditional cuisine), "Tourism destinations of Kuzbass", and "Kemerovo – the administrative center of Kuzbass". While doing practical tasks, the trainees also practiced the skills of preparing PowerPoint presentations in English. Along with this, the students practiced the skills of translating professional texts from English into Russian and from Russian into English and learnt to adapt the translations made with the help of machine translation systems and online translators. As final assessment, the students were asked to present a fragment of a guided tour of the city of Kemerovo in English.

The key difference between this program and the traditional method of teaching foreign languages was the shift from studying grammar and reading texts to enhancing

conversational formulas and simulating of real situations in the tourism and hospitality sphere. Great attention was also paid to such competences as the ability to work with Internet resources and team work.

When designing this program, the principles of the CLIL methodology were taken into account. The essence of this technique lies in close connection of studying the subject material with studying the foreign language required to discuss it. For example, in the framework of the module "Service", the trainees watched Youtube training videos in English, simulating the situations of checking-in at a hotel; they also studied the English versions of the websites of the hotels and restaurants of the city of Kemerovo, discussed their usefulness and informativity for foreigners, and also translated 'the Siberian menu' of "The Zaboy" restaurant in English. Thus, the emphasis in the classroom has shifted from learning a foreign language itself to studying the language means used in specific situations, taking into account the regional component.

The combination of these teaching methods allowed for a full implementation of the competence-based approach in teaching foreign languages, within which five major competences need to be formed (**Figure 2**) [14].
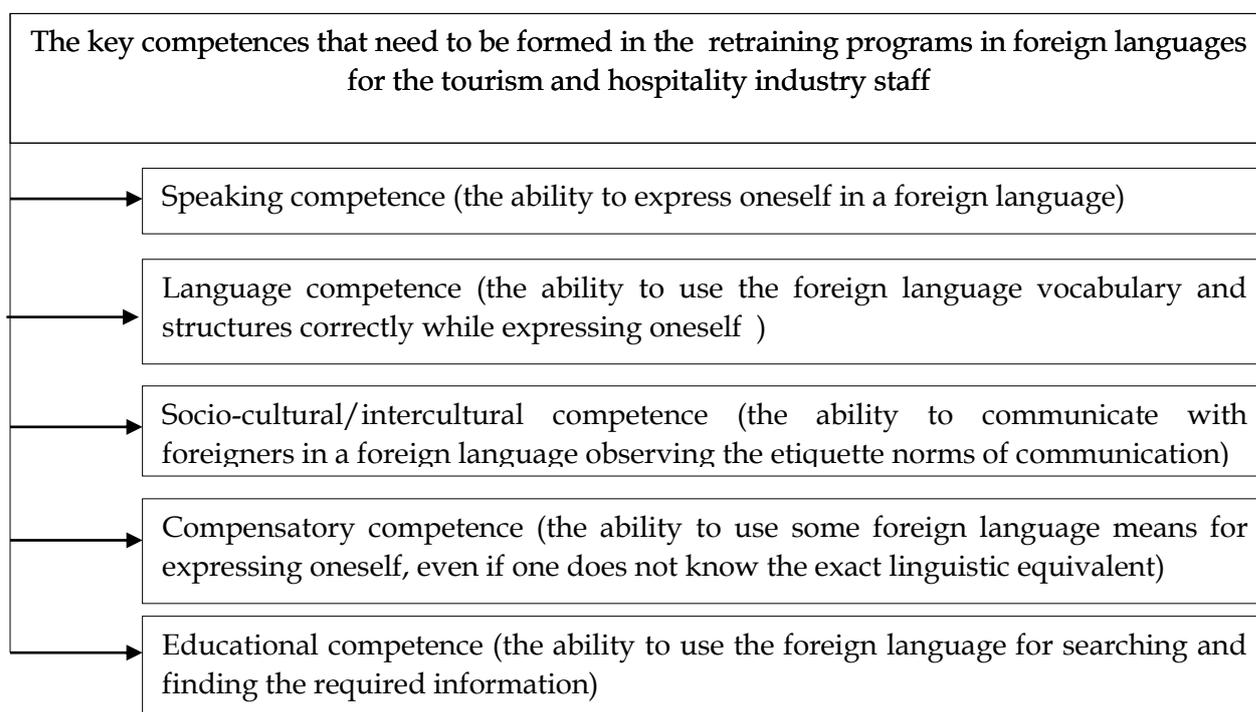

The key competences that need to be formed in the retraining programs in foreign languages for the tourism and hospitality industry staff

Speaking competence (the ability to express oneself in a foreign language)

Language competence (the ability to use the foreign language vocabulary and structures correctly while expressing oneself)

Socio-cultural/intercultural competence (the ability to communicate with foreigners in a foreign language observing the etiquette norms of communication)

Compensatory competence (the ability to use some foreign language means for expressing oneself, even if one does not know the exact linguistic equivalent)

Educational competence (the ability to use the foreign language for searching and finding the required information)

Figure 2. Key competences of the trainees formed in the retraining programs in foreign languages for the tourism and hospitality industry staff

The use of this methods allowed adapting the teaching material to be used in groups with different levels of foreign language skill: the same subject material was discussed, the same 'problem situations' were solved in different groups to almost the same extent, but

with the use of grammar and other structures of different levels of complexity. For example, the text on the history of the city of Kemerovo can be used in groups with low language skill for reading, describing pictures, answering questions, translation, etc. In the group with a higher level of language skill the same text can be pre-modified by the teacher and used as an exercise on finding grammatical errors in the text, for training lexical and grammatical transformations, etc.

DISCUSSION

O.V. Kaurova et al. [15] had argued that the quality of training hospitality staff should be enhanced, specifically as far as foreign language skills are concerned. On the other hand, a lot of researches focus on relevant methods and techniques for improving the quality of teaching foreign languages [16, 17, 18].

K. V. Yumatov, L.G. Kiriyanova and N.S. Yakimova participated in the studies on implementing the PBL method in training tourism and hospitality industry staff, which is reflected in a number of publications [19, 20, 21]. The other co-authors of the paper – [22, 23] also yearly publish the results of their studies on the state and prospects of enhancing the system of training tourism and hospitality staff.

Yet, in the previous works little attention has been paid to using Problem-Based Learning (PBL), Life-Long Learning (LLL) and Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) methods in training the staff for tourism and hospitality clusters.

The results of this study allow making a further step in proving the advantages of using the methods listed above in university programs as well as professional development and retraining programs taking into account the activity features and demands of the tourism and hospitality enterprises

CONCLUSION

Thus, the results of the study suggest using PBL and other active teaching methods in the system of training staff for the tourism and hospitality clusters allows enhancing the quality of teaching students and professional development programs' trainees. This conclusion is based on the results of validating the suggested methods in teaching Master's Degree programs as well as professional development and retraining programs for the tourism and hospitality industry at Kemerovo State University.

The study results presented in this paper can be used by the knowledge institutions training tourism and hospitality staff as well as by the head of tourism and hospitality enterprises in developing the strategies of staff training and development.

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